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SUBJECT: ANTANANARIVO POL/ECON WEEKLY UPDATE (09/25/2009)

REF: A) ANTANANARIVO 676

11. (U) SUMMARY: This is U.S. Embassy Antananarivo's Weekly Update for September 21 to 25, an unclassified review of major political, economic, and commercial events and information from the U.S. Mission to Madagascar and the Comoros.

POLITICAL (paras 2-7)
- Rajoelina at the UN General Assembly
- Trial of Legalist leaders
- Political demonstrations
- Civil society enters the mediation fray
- Pierrot: Birth of a new party, death of an old one?
- Tana Mission offsite

ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL (paras 8-11)
- Madagascar-Thailand cooperation
- Review of mining contracts, adoption of new petroleum code
- Shipwreck leads to possible ecological disaster
- Visit to Self-Help Projects

END SUMMARY

POLITICS

12. (SBU) RAJOELINA AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: Antananarivo has been calm this week, with all eyes on New York as HAT President Andry "TGV" RAJOELINA prepared for a speech to UNGA. He is currently slated to speak in the afternoon on September 25, according to the UN website, although his presidency remains unrecognized by the international community - and the UN itself. Rajoelina's attendance at UNGA, and particularly his invitation to a Wednesday meeting on climate change, has sparked intense speculation about "UN recognition" of Madagascar's ruling HAT. Internet media, however, has also noted that Rajoelina's request to meet with the Secretary General was declined, and that he was left out of a White House event for African leaders (see ref A).

13. (SBU) TRIAL OF LEGALIST LEADERS: Pro-Ravalomanana leaders Manandafy RAKOTONIRINA and Ihanta RANDRIAMANDRATO received suspended sentences on September 22 (of two years, and of six months, respectively) for breach of public and state security, inciting civil war, misuse of title, unauthorized organization of public gatherings, and destruction of public property. They were released in August, following the Maputo I accords, and had remained out on bail since. Former Senator Eliane NAIKA, arrested on September 12 for alleged involvement in recent violence, was also released on bail on the 22nd. A dual French/Malagasy citizen, she has since

left the country for Europe, after stating publicly that she had been "brutalized but not raped." Ms. Randriamandrato's husband, Ralitera ANDRIANANDRAINANA, remains the only high-profile prisoner of concern still being held; his case has been pushed back several times, and he is currently scheduled for a hearing on September 30.

14. (SBU) POLITICAL DEMONSTRATIONS MUTED: Following the AU's announcement of an ICG-M meeting to take place in Antananarivo on October 6, former President Albert ZAFY'S movement suspended further demonstrations; demonstrations by Ravalomanana's movement continued on a small scale at the Magro facility north of city center. The three movements have, however, planned a joint political rally for Saturday, September 26, in apparent contradiction of their previous announcement (see ref A).

15. (SBU) CIVIL SOCIETY ENTERS THE MEDIATION FRAY: Numerous civil society organizations joined together on September 18 to propose that they, along with the armed forces, re-launch talks between the four movements with a focus on implementing the Maputo accords. Their stated goal is to reach a resolution before the ICG-M meeting on October 6. Army Chief of Staff Andre NDRIARIJAONA has gone only as far as stating that he is not against a mediation role if required, but political leaders have given the idea a cooler reception. This is but the latest in a series of civil society initiatives over the course of the crisis to insert themselves into the mediation effort. All previous attempts have been stymied by the lack of a coherent position within civil society, and widespread perceptions of partisanship among their leaders.

16. (U) BIRTH OF A NEW PARTY, DEATH OF AN OLD ONE? On September 19, Pierrot RAJAONARIVelo announced that he would create a new political party in two weeks, with a focus on reducing poverty and

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implementing "real [...] development, democracy, and good governance". This announcement triggered dissent within the two main AREMA factions (AREMA is the party of former President Didier Ratsiraka, which split into three factions after Ravalomanana's 2002 victory, one of which was headed by Rajaonarivelo). Pro-Ratsiraka members of AREMA denounced the move, declaring that Rajaonarivelo had already left the party in 2007; Rajaonarivelo's supporters retort that he remains SG of AREMA, and that other "factions" had misled Ratsiraka, and public opinion, in an attempt to split the party after 2002. Regardless of the fallout within AREMA, this move positions Rajaonarivelo for a presidential bid in any eventual elections.

17. (U) OFFSITE: Mission staff held a strategic planning retreat September 21 and 22 at the Peace Corps training facility two hours East of Tana to discuss ideas for the coming year. An action plan and democracy strategy paper will be developed based on the fruitful discussions to inform the Mission's engagement in Madagascar and the Comoros.

ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL

18. (U) MADAGASCAR-THAILAND COOPERATION: A Thai delegation arrived in Madagascar on September 16 and met with HAT Prime Minister Roindifo MONJA. Mr. Sengmamy, head of the delegation, announced investments of USD 10 million over ten years. The alleged investments will cover several sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, mining, micro-finance, and the rehabilitation of the main avenue of the capital. This would be a significant expansion of Thailand's previous investments in Madagascar, which were primarily in the gem industry.

19. (SBU) REVIEW OF MINING CONTRACTS, ADOPTION OF NEW PETROLEUM CODE: Recently-appointed HAT Minister of Mining and Hydrocarbons Mamy RATOVOMALALA announced plans to meet with the large mining companies to discuss their current contracts, and evaluate their influence on local quality of life. In addition, the minister declared that a new petroleum code will be adopted before the end of this year. This new code will grant tax incentives to attract more foreign investments in the sector, and will address the legal framework of

the bio-energy sector. Generally, his remarks were received by investors with guarded relief, following blatant (but unsuccessful) extortion attempts against some of them by others in the HAT.

¶10. (U) SHIPWRECK LEADS TO POSSIBLE ECOLOGICAL DISASTER: Tissue samples from four whales found dead on the south coast of Madagascar were taken for analysis to a French laboratory to explore a possible link to the recent sinking of the Turkish ship "Gulser Ana" off the southern tip of Madagascar. Pending the results, the Ministries of Fishing and Transportation have taken preventive measures, and issued a ban on fishing in the southern region of the country. As fishing represents the main source of income for one-third of the region's population, this prohibition has exacerbated local food insecurity. The World Food Program has pledged USD 250,000 in assistance to address this need, but further assistance will likely be required.

¶11. (U) SOME SELF-HELP PROJECTS CONTINUE: Special Self-Help Coordinator visited six project sites in three northern regions of Madagascar last week, completing final evaluations on four projects involving clean water, solar energy, latrines, and equipment for a health clinic. One of the fully-funded projects from this year is in the process of building a latrine, shower, and a well for a kindergarten class. Progress on a second project from this year, which provided for the construction of a well to provide water to a school, has halted due to the suspension of the SSH program in Madagascar. The amount of funding disbursed for five of the projects totals USD 16,000.

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